

Douglas County Voluntary  
Stewardship Program

PRODUCER'S  
HANDBOOK



A quick guide to everything you  
need to know about the  
Voluntary Stewardship Program in  
Douglas County

*“Volunteer or Voluntold,  
how do you like your  
Agriculture?”*

# Contents

VSP Overview.....p.1  
Frequently Asked Questions.....p.2  
VSP Producer Survey.....p.5  
Farm-Scale Plans.....p.6  
Implementing Conservation Activities.....p.8  
Educational Opportunities.....p.8  
Technical Service Providers.....p.10

*The Voluntary Stewardship Program aims to protect critical areas where they intersect with agricultural activities, **through voluntary, incentive-based measures**, while at the same time improving the long term viability of agriculture.*

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# Voluntary Stewardship Program Overview

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) provides a **non-regulatory, incentive-based** method of critical area protection on lands that intersect agricultural activities. VSP is an alternative to the traditional method to protect critical areas, which is to enforce regulations adopted under Critical Area Ordinances of the Growth Management Act. The primary goals of the VSP in Douglas County are:

- Promote conservation activities that protect and enhance critical areas, while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture;
- Focus and maximize voluntary incentive programs to encourage good land stewardship;
- Rely on voluntary conservation activities as the primary method of protecting critical areas. VSP will not require the cessation of agricultural activities or the use of regulations.



Figure: Anchor QEA

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What are critical areas?**

Critical areas are specifically defined by the Growth Management Act. The five critical areas the GMA identifies are: (1) fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, (2) wetlands, (3) geologically hazardous areas, (4) frequently flooded areas, and (5) areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water.

## **Are there critical areas on my land?**

Critical areas are designated by the county, and each critical area has unique characteristics that are used for identification. Maps are a useful tool to help identify where critical areas occur, however, presence of critical areas is determined on an individual site basis. If you are interested learning more about critical areas on your land contact Aaron Rosenblum, Douglas County VSP Coordinator (see back page for contact information).

Given the large acreage of land in Douglas County that is considered a critical area, most operations will have *at least* one critical area occurring.

## **Who is eligible to participate?**

All Douglas County producers can participate in VSP, regardless of whether or not critical areas occur directly on the land.

## What is the difference between VSP and Critical Area Ordinances?

Critical Area Ordinances	Voluntary Stewardship Program
· Protection achieved through a <b>regulatory pathway</b> know as Critical Area Ordinances	· Protection achieved through <b>voluntary, incentive-based measures</b>
· Protection of critical areas must be demonstrated and enforced on the <b>individual parcel</b> scale	· Protection of critical areas must be demonstrated on the <b>watershed scale</b>
· Changes to your operation would <b>require</b> a critical area <b>permit</b>	· <b>No additional permits or regulations</b>
· Damage to critical areas <b>must</b> be offset at the <b>landowner's expense</b>	· Critical area functions and values monitored at the watershed scale, and all producers in the watershed contribute to their protection
· Protection typically achieved through measures such as <b>mandatory no-touch buffers</b>	· A wide variety of <b>conservation activities</b> are available to protect and/or enhance critical areas, <b>including many that you are already doing!</b>

### What happens if VSP fails in Douglas County?

Failure of the VSP work plan will trigger the regulatory approach described above to ensure critical area protection for areas with agricultural activities occurring. This would subject Douglas County producers to new regulations!

### How could VSP fail in Douglas County?

The VSP work plan for Douglas County bases critical area protection on the amount of conservation activities that are implemented across the county. VSP in Douglas County could fail if producers do not continue to implement conservation activities that protect and/or enhance critical areas, or the implementation of activities is not communicated and accounted for. This means that all that is needed to make VSP succeed is the implementation of conservation activities that also enhance your agricultural viability!

## **What is a conservation activity?**

Conservation activities are all stewardship actions being implemented by Douglas County producers that protect, preserve, and/or enhance natural resources. These include NRCs Conservation Practices, and all other stewardship actions.

Examples of conservation activities include, *but are not limited to*: conservation cover, conservation tillage (reduced till and no till), Global G.A.P IFA Fruit and Vegetables Standard Certificate, wildlife habitat management, irrigation water management, nutrient management, prescribed grazing, riparian buffers, integrated pest management, and organic certification.

Descriptions of these and other conservation activities can be found on the VSP webpage (see back page for web address).

## **How does VSP protect my privacy?**

All VSP reporting is done at the watershed scale, not the individual parcel scale. This means that no personally identifying information is necessary to implement VSP.

## **How do I benefit from participating in VSP?**

- Participating in VSP contributes to its success, which means less regulatory burden on you and most Douglas County producers.
- FREE technical assistance is available to you to help plan and implement conservation activities
- Cost-share funding is available to help offset any potential risk of implementing conservation activities.
- VSP only encourages the implementation of conservation activities that also are intended to benefit your agricultural viability.

## **How can I participate in VSP?**

The rest of this handbook outlines the ways producers can participate in VSP. Participation in VSP is 100% voluntary.

# VSP Producer Survey

Once every five years, a VSP producer survey will be administered. This is the simplest and easiest way to participate in VSP, as filling out a survey should take no more than five minutes. **Every producer in Douglas County should fill out a survey each time it is administered (once every five years).**

Here are 3 important reasons to take the producer survey:

- **TO AVOID FURTHER REGULATIONS!** The survey is one of the primary ways the VSP accounts for all of the great voluntary conservation activities that you all are doing out there. Demonstrating to the state that Douglas County producers are protecting critical areas by implementing voluntary conservation activities is how the VSP succeeds. This means that your responses in this survey are necessary for the success of VSP.
- **The information you provide in the survey will inform and direct future cost-share and educational opportunities.** This is your chance to tell us what cost-share and educational opportunities will benefit your operation. The conservation districts will use this information to apply for funding that benefits you.
- **It's anonymous and confidential.** VSP reporting is done on the watershed scale, so there is no need to match your answers to a spot on the map.

The survey will be available at all technical service provider offices if it is currently being administered. The survey can also be completed online (see the VSP webpage for details).

## Farm-Scale Plans

There are three different types of farm-scale planning activities available to Douglas County producers **at no cost**. Farm-scale plans are used to help identify and implement conservation activities that address natural resource and agricultural viability concerns. The process provides you a one-on-one opportunity to discuss your operation with technical service providers, receive feedback, and ultimately develop a stewardship plan that meets your needs. **There is no requirement in VSP to receive any type of farm level planning to implement conservation activities.**

Each of the three plans fulfills a slightly different purpose, so the plan(s) you choose will depend largely on your own operational goals and concerns. The table on the following page will help you choose the plan that is right for you.

The three types of farm-scale planning activities and their goals are:

- **NRCS Conservation Plan:** Identify resource concerns and the appropriate conservation activities to address them.
- **Multiple Species General Conservation Plan Site-Specific Plan (SSP):** Identify conservation activities and create a plan necessary to protect shrub-steppe habitat for four species of conservation concern. **The SSP is necessary to apply for a Section-10 Incidental Take Permit.**
- **Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP):** Identify critical area and agricultural viability concerns and develop a plan to address them

	<b>Individual Stewardship Plan</b>	<b>Site Specific Plan (SSP)</b>	<b>NRCS Conservation Plan</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Identify critical area and agricultural viability concerns, and develop strategy to address the concerns	Identify conservation activities and create plan necessary to protect the 4 covered species and associated habitat	Identify resource concerns and conservation practices to address them
<b>Necessary to apply for...</b>	ISP not necessary to apply for funding/cost-share, or implement conservation activities	Section 10 Incidental Take Permit	NRCS program funding/cost share
<b>Applicable Programs</b>	VSP	MSGCP, VSP	EQIP, SGI, CSP, VSP, MSGCP
<b>Entity Responsible for technical</b>	FCCD, SDCD	FCCD, USFWS	NRCS, FCCD
<b>Evaluation Tools</b>	PHS, 303d lists, critical area maps, Natural Heritage program rare plants and ecosystems lists. Will be largely open ended, based on landowner needs/concerns and applicable critical areas	Operator Maps and acres of covered agricultural activities used as surrogate to estimate "take" of covered species (analysis and associated FONSI already completed in programmatic MSGCP)	Resource Concerns Checklists, WEPS, RUSLE2, Win-PST, Water Quality TN 1, Range 5, Rangeland Health Assessment, SVAP2, Biological TN 14, Sage Grouse Habitat Evaluation Guide, Sage Grouse Threats Checklist
<b>Field inventory required</b>	No	No	Yes
<b>Monitoring required</b>	No	Yes, per conditions of the permit	No (certain conservation practices do require monitoring once contracted with NRCS)
<b>Plan intensity level</b>	Varies, depends on landowner needs and concerns, but generally lower	Lower	Higher
<b>Products</b>	Narrative describing plan to address concerns consistent with goals of the VSP work plan	Description of covered agricultural activities, Map of covered activities and habitat protected with quantified acres for each, description of voluntary activities to benefit covered species' habitat including steps taken to minimize and mitigate impacts to covered species and associated habitat, a monitoring plan	CPA-52, Narrative of resource concerns and conservation practices to address them, grazing schedule/plan (if applicable)
<b>Fee</b>	No	None for the SSP, but permit application fee is \$100	No
<b>Relationship to other plans (no plan is mutually exclusive)</b>	To be used if operator is not interested in Incidental Take Permit or NRCS programs. Applicable information from this plan can be transferred to either of the other plans as long as the operation and circumstances remain consistent	Can be acquired without any other plan, although a common route will be to receive a NRCS Plan first, then a SSP. Information from the NRCS Plan will be used to complete the SSP	Will commonly be used as a first step towards applying for an Incidental Take Permit. Information from the NRCS Plan will transfer to the SSP
<b>Point of Contact</b>	Aaron Rosenblum (FCCD) 509-423-5990 Cell 509-888-6372 Office	Elizabeth Hanwacker (FCCD) 509-630-2369 Cell 509-888-6372 Office	Will Keller (NRCS) 509-422-2750 x104 Office

## Implementing Conservation Activities

The implementation of conservation activities is the ultimate goal of all other levels of VSP participation. **Ultimately, the success of the Douglas County VSP depends on the implementation of conservation activities.**

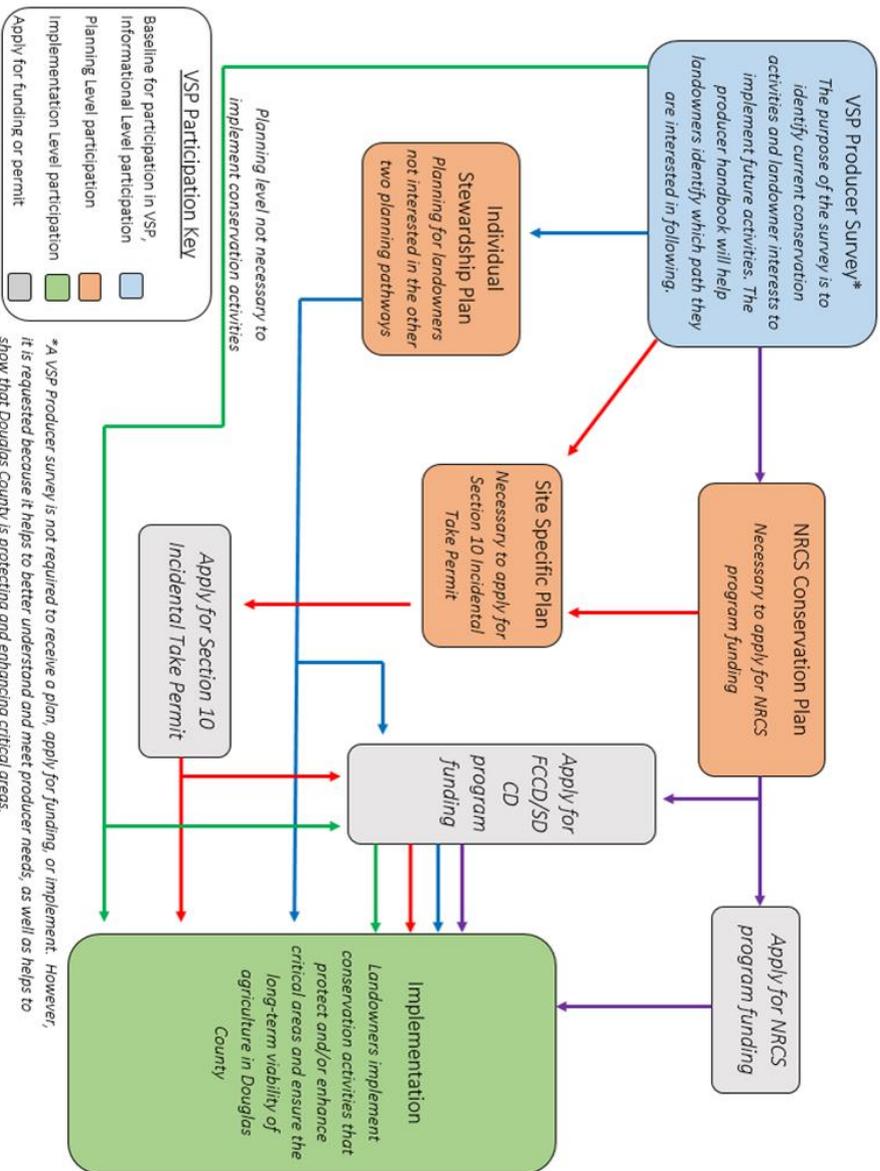
There are many ways you can receive cost-share or technical assistance to implement conservation activities. NRCS offers funding and cost-share through a wide variety of conservation activities through various Farm Bill programs. Foster Creek Conservation District and South Douglas Conservation District offer several technical assistance and cost-share opportunities including programs for riparian restoration, biocontrols, fuels reductions, direct seed, and construction.

Even if you are not participating in one of the above programs, free technical assistance is available to you through VSP to help plan for future conservation activity implementation.

## Educational Opportunities

Attending educational events and/or activities is a key way you can participate in VSP. Educational events provide useful and demonstrated information, allowing you to make more informed decisions. Educational opportunities to be offered will include workshops, field tours, demonstrations, meetings. If you are interested in a particular educational activity or topic, please let one of the Technical Service Providers know and be sure to include your request on the VSP Producer Survey!

## VSP Implementation Process



\*A VSP Producer survey is not required to receive a plan, apply for funding, or implement. However, it is requested because it helps to better understand and meet producer needs, as well as helps to show that Douglas County is protecting and enhancing critical areas.

# Technical Service Providers

## **Foster Creek Conservation District**

203 s Rainier St. Waterville, WA 98858

509-888-6372

fostercreekcd.org

Contact for: General VSP inquires, Section 10 Incidental Take Permits, riparian restoration, biocontrols, direct seed cost-share, Farmed Smart Program, all other cost-share projects within district boundaries.

## **South Douglas Conservation District**

206 N Chelan Ave. Waterville, WA 98858

509-745-9160

Southdouglascd.com

Contact for: Firewise, fuel control projects, Vets on the Farm, tree and shrub plant sale, all other cost-share projects within district boundaries.

## **Natural Resource Conservation Service – Waterville Office**

203 E Locust St. Waterville, WA 98858

509-745-8362

nrcs.usda.gov

Contact for: All Farm Bill program funding including EQIP, CSP, and SGI.

## **Douglas County VSP Webpage:**

<http://www.fostercreekcd.org/programs/voluntary-stewardship-program/>

## **Questions?**

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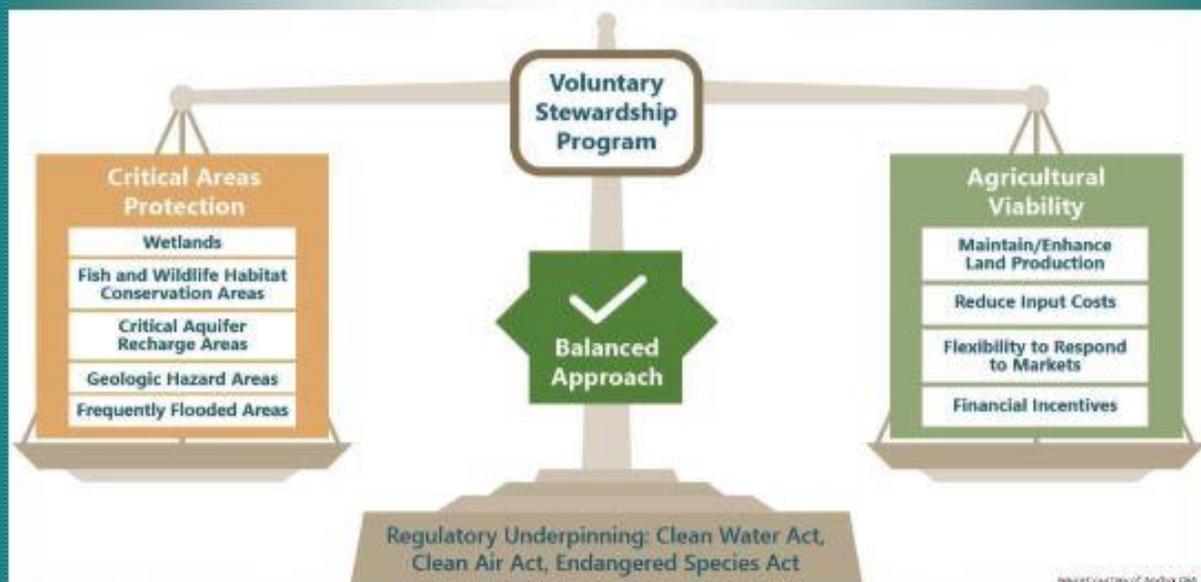
# Douglas County

## Voluntary Stewardship Program

*“Volunteer or voluntold, how do you like your agriculture?”*

The Voluntary Stewardship Program aims to protect critical areas where they intersect with agricultural activities through **voluntary, incentive-based measures**, while at the same time improving the long term viability of agriculture.

DOUGLAS COUNTY PRODUCERS:  
THIS PROGRAM BENEFITS YOU!



# Two Options for Agriculture to Protect Critical Areas

Growth Management Act	Voluntary Stewardship Program
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Protection of critical areas must be demonstrated and enforced on the <b>individual parcel scale</b>	Protection of critical areas must be demonstrated on the <b>watershed scale</b>
Changes to your operation would <b>require a critical area permit</b>	<b>No additional permits or regulations</b>
Damage to critical areas <b>must be offset at the landowner's expense</b>	Critical area functions and values monitored at the watershed scale, and all conservation activities implemented in the watershed contribute to their protection
Protection typically achieved through measures such as <b>mandatory no-touch buffers</b>	A wide variety of conservation activities are available to protect and/or enhance critical areas, <b>including many that you are already doing!</b>

*The Success of VSP in Douglas County depends entirely on the participation of agricultural producers. If the program should fail to protect critical areas, agricultural operators would be subject to a regulatory approach to critical area protection.*

# How to Participate

**Every producer in Douglas County can participate!**

- Sign up to receive VSP information and materials
- Take the VSP Producer Survey (coming in 2018)
  - Ensures the success of VSP because it helps account for all the great conservation activities producers are doing
  - Allows producers to tell Technical Service Providers which conservation activities they are interested in receiving cost-share or technical assistance for in the future
- Receive free technical assistance to plan for future conservation activity implementation
- Implement conservation activities that protect and/or enhance critical areas and ensure your long-term agricultural viability



## The Next Steps:

- The county-wide work plan is on track to be completed and approved by the state in the spring of 2018
- A VSP producer handbook that contains everything you need to know will be available shortly



Questions?

Contact:

Aaron Rosenblum

Douglas County VSP Coordinator

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509-888-6376 office

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Douglas County, WA